# cooking 101

## a handy guide for anyone learning to cook on their own

you've got this.

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# simple ingredients to keep on hand for fast dinners

- Eggs
- Boneless, skinless chicken breasts (can keep in the freezer)
- Ground turkey or beef (can keep in the freezer)
- Bread + deli meat + condiments
- Tortillas
- Cheese (slices, shredded cheese, or a block of cheese)
- Pasta
- Rice (brown or white)
- Jarred spaghetti sauce (or a can of crushed tomatoes you can easily season with dried basil, oregano, garlic and onion powder)
- Baby carrots and other vegetables you like to eat (broccoli, cauliflower, celery) + lettuce if you like salads or use it on sandwiches
- Potatoes (they keep for a long time in a cool, dry spot)
- Frozen peas and corn (and other vegetables you like)
- A few simple spices (salt, pepper, garlic powder, basil, oregano, chili powder, and others that you use frequently)
- Canned beans/refried beans
- Crushed tomatoes, diced tomatoes and tomato paste
- Chicken broth or bouillon
- Olive oil

# no recipe meals:

-Scrambled eggs or an omelet with ham (or bacon), cheese and vegetables (zucchini, mushrooms, broccoli, etc.). You can easily leave it meatless and veggie-less (just don't tell your mom). Serve with toast, if you want!

-A million ways to cook eggs: homemade "egg McMuffins" with a fried egg, cheese and toasted English muffin; scrambled eggs/breakfast burritos, over-easy eggs on toast, omelets, etc. Omelets are a great way to add meat (chopped deli ham and any veggie of your choice!) – serve with toast if you want!

-Skillet-cooked chicken breast with steamed veggies. Season chicken with salt and pepper. Heat a bit of oil in a skillet over medium heat, cook the chicken for a. couple of minutes on each side until cooked through. Steam broccoli or peas in the microwave – season well with salt and pepper!

-Grilled cheese (and a million variations), like grilled ham and cheese, grilled turkey and Swiss /cheddar with bacon, and more. Try adding thinly sliced apples or avocados for a tasty variation.

-Loaded quesadillas: take two tortillas and top one with any leftover chicken or beef (deli meat works great, too), cheese and any vegetables you like (you'd be surprised – almost anything is good on a quesadilla!). Toast in a skillet until golden and heated through.

-Wraps + Sandwiches: so many things are super tasty rolled up in a wrap/tortilla or eaten sandwich-style:
-tuna + mayo or Greek yogurt (add chopped celery or peppers for crunch)
-classic BLT (bacon, lettuce, tomato)…add avocado if you love it
-peanut butter and bananas (or just classic PB&J) – yes, even in a wrap!
-deli meat + cheese fixings (add lettuce, tomatoes, mustard, mayo, whatever!)

-Easy Buttered Noodles: cook 8 ounces of pasta of your choice according to package directions. Drain and return to the pot. Add 3 tablespoons butter, ¼ cup Parmesan cheese (just eyeball it!) and a sprinkle of salt and pepper. Toss the noodles until the butter melts and serve warm.

-Italian chopped salad: chop up some romaine lettuce, tomatoes, and salami or pepperoni. Toss with shredded mozzarella, a drained can of garbanzo or white beans, and your favorite Italian dressing.

-White Bean Tuna Salad: tuna packet + drained can of white beans + salt and pepper + splash of lemon juice - serve with crackers.

-Flatbread pizzas: grab naan or flatbread from the store. Top with jarred marinara or pizza sauce, top with cheese and pepperoni (or whatever toppings you want). Place on a baking pan and broil on LOW in the oven for a couple minutes (watch closely!) until cheese is bubbly. Can also cook in the microwave in a pinch!

-Baked potatoes. To bake, wrap potato in foil and pierce several times with the tines of a fork. Bake at 375 degrees for 35-40 minutes until tender (can also cook the potato in the microwave – but don't wrap it in foil!). Top with chopped ham, sour cream, cheese, chili + guacamole – get creative!

-Easy chicken parmesan. Sauté chicken (seasoned well with salt and pepper) in a skillet. When cooked through, pour in a cup or two of jarred spaghetti sauce, sprinkle shredded mozzarella over the top and serve over cooked pasta (or by itself!).

-Mason jar salads: pour dressing (1 to 4 tablespoons) in the bottom of a wide-mouth canning jar (pint or quart, depending on how hungry you are), chopped veggies, sliced deli meat, dried fruit, nuts (options are endless) and stuff salad greens (romaine, iceberg, spinach, etc) on top to reach the top of the jar. Put on a lid and refrigerate (for up to a couple of days).

-Sausage Skillet Meal: slice precooked chicken sausage (like Aidells brand) and cook in a skillet with a bit of oil until golden. Add drained can of beans, veggies, spinach or kale, and cook until heated through. Add cheese if you want! Or cook up the sausage and serve in a bowl with rice and vegetables. Frozen veggies heat up quickly for recipes like this!

-Simple tacos: cook 1/2 pound ground beef or ground turkey in a skillet with a pinch of salt, pepper. When meat is no longer pink, drain excess grease. Add a taco seasoning packet OR a few pinches of each of the following: chili powder, ground cumin, paprika (if you have it), dried oregano, garlic powder, and onion powder. Add 8-ounce can tomato sauce and a few tablespoons water and simmer for a few minutes.

-Grilled cheese + tomato soup

-Breakfast for dinner in all its forms: French toast, pancakes, oatmeal, yogurt + granola, etc.

-Bagged salad with tuna or leftover protein on top with croutons, fresh veggies and dressing

# strategies for grocery shopping

## set a budget before anything else

Set a grocery budget before you go to the store and most importantly, before you plan your menu. If you can't afford steak and shrimp, don't plan it on the menu!

## shop with a list

This may be the single most important strategy to save money and keep you on track. If you

## plan your meals

You'll spend way less money if you only go to the grocery store once a week (or better yet, once every two weeks!)

## look for what is on sale

A couple warnings though: don't buy things on sale that you didn't plan to in the first place; even if something is on sale (like, say, frozen burritos) doesn't mean you need to buy a whole case.

## don't go to the grocery store hungry

It's a really bad idea. Trust me. You'll come out having spent your monthly budget on what sounded good at the moment. And tomorrow when you are slightly less ravenous, whatever you impulse-hunger bought may not seem as appealing.

## avoid mini-size or individually packaged foods

Especially fruits and vegetables and pre-seasoned meats. The grocery store is charging you more for those items but they are simple things you can easily do at home. If you have access to freezer space, buying a larger package of deli meat or chicken is usually more cost-effective and you can freeze extras for future meals.

# basic kitchen equipment

*Essentials:*

10-inch nonstick skillet
One good chopping knife (a mini Santoku or sharp paring knife)
4-quart saucepan/pot
Cutting board
9X13-inch metal pan
Wooden spoon
Whisk
Flat spatula for turning eggs/pancakes
Silicone spatula
Medium glass mixing bowl (that is microwave safe)
Measuring cups
Measuring spoons
2-cup liquid measuring cup
Can opener
Cheese grater
Hot pads

*Optional (but kind of fun):*

Muffin tin
Miniature muffin tin
11X17-inch rimmed baking sheets (because, cookies)
Blender
Tongs (for salad, flipping meat while cooking)
6-quart Instant Pot or other electric pressure cooker
Air fryer
Toaster
Electric hand mixer
Serrated knife
Garlic press
Potato masher
Kitchen scale

And about a million other things – totally dependent on what and how you like to cook and bake! ☺

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# a few handy dandy equivalents & measurements

## SMALL VOLUME (LIQUID:)

| TABLESPOONS | CUPS | FLUID OUNCES |
|---|---|---|
| 1 tablespoon | 3 teaspoons | 1/2 fluid ounce |
| 2 tablespoons | 1/8 cup | 1 fluid ounce |
| 4 tablespoons | 1/4 cup | 2 fluid ounces |
| 5 tablespoons + 1 teaspoon | 1/3 cup | |
| 16 tablespoons | 1 cup | 8 fluid ounces |

## LARGE VOLUME (LIQUID):

| CUPS | FLUID OUNCES | PINTS/QUARTS/GALLONS |
|---|---|---|
| 1 cup | 8 fluid ounces | 1/2 pint |
| 2 cups | 16 fluid ounces | 1 pint=1/2 quart |
| 3 cups | 24 fluid ounces | 1 1/2 pints |
| 4 cups | 32 fluid ounces | 2 pints=1 quart |
| 8 cups | 64 fluid ounces | 2 quarts=1/2 gallon |
| 16 cups | 128 fluid ounces | 4 quarts=1gallon |

## DRY MEASUREMENTS:

1 cup = 16 tablespoons
1 pound dry = 16 ounces

# easy peasy healthy fast delicious recipes

(plus a few treats at the end for good luck!)

**Be sure to look at the serving size of the meals before making – some of the recipes serve 2-3 people (which will still leave you with leftovers to eat for the week). Other recipes serve 5-6 so that the leftovers can be frozen to later. Feel free to cut down or increase any of the recipes to make fewer or more servings.**

# how to cook rice

**increase rice, water and salt as needed for larger quantities**

To cook white rice: add 1 cup long grain white rice + 1 3/4 cups water + 1 teaspoon salt to a saucepan with a lid. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to low, immediately cover, and cook for 15 minutes. DO NOT LIFT THE LID. Remove from the heat and let stand for 10 minutes. Lift the lid, fluff the rice with a fork and serve.

To cook brown rice: bring six cups of water to boil in 3- or 4-quart pot. Add 1 cup brown rice + 1 teaspoon salt. Boil for 30 minutes, uncovered, lowering heat to prevent overflowing, if needed (but keep it at a boil). Drain off cooking water, return rice to the pot, cover with a lid and let rest for 5-10 minutes. Fluff and serve.

# how to make a baked potato

To oven bake a potato (or multiple potatoes): wrap potato in foil and pierce several times with the tines of a fork. Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Place foil-wrapped potato directly on oven rack. Bake for 35-40 minutes until tender (pierce with a fork or sharp knife to test).

To microwave a potato: wash and dry potato. Pierce several times with the tines of a fork. Microwave for 3 ½ minutes. Flip the potato. Microwave for another 3-4 minutes until the potato is tender, adding time as needed.

# how to hard-boil eggs

To hard-boil eggs on the stovetop: bring several quarts water to a boil in a medium pot. Carefully add room temperature eggs (don't drop them in, lower with a spoon so they don't crack). The water should be covering the eggs by at least an inch, if not, add hot water to cover. Bring the water to a gentle simmer (not a rolling boil) and simmer for 12 minutes. Fill a bowl with ice water. Use a spoon to lift the boiled eggs out of the hot water and into the ice bath. Let them rest in the ice bath for 5-10 minutes before peeling.

To hard-boil eggs in an Instant Pot: Place 1 cup cold water in insert of Instant Pot. Add the steam rack and set eggs on the rack. Secure the lid, set the valve to seal and cook on high pressure for 5 minutes. Let the pressure naturally release for 5 minutes and then quick release the remaining pressure. Use a spoon to lift eggs out of the Instant Pot into an ice bath. Let the eggs sit in the ice bath for 5-10 minutes before peeling.

# more recipe inspiration

main dish

make-ahead meals

instant pot

one-pot meals

meatless

pasta

breakfast

breads

desserts

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# crispy chicken bacon ranch wraps

Makes 3 wraps

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 cups cooked, chopped chicken (can use canned chicken, drained)
1 cup lightly packed fresh baby spinach, chopped
3 to 4 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled
¼ to ½ cup ranch dressing
2 teaspoons dry ranch mix (optional)
1 cup shredded cheddar or Monterey Jack cheese
3 burrito-size tortillas (10-inch)

DIRECTIONS

1. In a bowl, add the chicken, spinach, bacon, ranch dressing and dry ranch seasoning (if using). Stir together until evenly combined.
2. To assemble: sprinkle about 1/4 to 1/3 cup cheese across tortilla. Spread 1/3 to 1/2 cup filling in a wide strip down the center of the tortilla. Fold one side of the tortilla over the filling, followed by the other side. Press lightly to flatten.
3. Heat a griddle or nonstick skillet on the stovetop to medium heat (about 350 degrees for an electric griddle).
4. Spray the seam side of the wraps with nonstick cooking spray or lightly brush with olive oil (this helps them get extra crispy).
5. Place the wraps seam-side down on the preheated griddle or skillet (cooking this side first will help them not fall apart). Cook until golden brown and crisp, about 2-4 minutes, pressing lightly with a spatula to flatten a bit while cooking.
6. Spray the top with nonstick cooking spray or brush lightly with oil and flip. Cook for another 2-4 minutes, pressing lightly with a spatula, until the tortilla is golden and the filling is hot and melty. Cut the wraps in half and serve warm.

# instant pot/slow cooker smoky honey chicken

*Freezes great to eat for lots of meals in the future! This chicken is great in tacos, over salads, in burritos, etc!*

Serves 6

INGREDIENTS
1 cup salsa verde (green salsa)
¼ cup honey
1 tablespoon liquid smoke, optional, but delicious
2 teaspoons chili powder
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1 teaspoon cumin
1 teaspoon garlic powder
½ teaspoon smoked or regular paprika
¼ teaspoon black pepper
½ cup chopped fresh cilantro
2-3 pounds boneless skinless chicken breasts, (about 3-4 chicken breasts, more if using thin cut)

DIRECTIONS
1. Whisk together the salsa verde, honey, liquid smoke, chili powder, salt, dried oregano, cumin, garlic powder (or fresh garlic), smoked paprika, and black pepper.
2. **For the Instant Pot:** Add the salsa verde mixture to the insert of the Instant Pot. Nestle the chicken into the sauce. Secure the lid and cook on high pressure for 12 minutes. Let the pressure naturally release for 10 minutes before manually releasing the rest of the pressure. Shred the chicken with two forks (right in the Instant Pot). Stir in the fresh cilantro and add additional salt and pepper to taste, if needed.
3. **For the Slow Cooker:** Add the salsa verde mixture to the insert of a 5- or 6-quart slow cooker. Nestle the chicken into the sauce. Cover the slow cooker and cook on low for 6-7 hours. If the mixture starts to look dry during cooking, add 1/2 cup or so chicken broth to the slow cooker and continue cooking. Shred the chicken with two forks (right in the slow cooker). Stir in the fresh cilantro and add additional salt and pepper to taste, if needed.
4. Serve the chicken as desired: tacos, enchiladas, burritos, over salad, etc.

# easy korean-style beef and rice

Serves 2 to 3

INGREDIENTS

1/2 pound ground turkey or ground beef or ground chicken
½ teaspoon garlic powder
Salt and pepper
1 tablespoon brown sugar
2 tablespoons soy sauce
2 tablespoons chicken or beef broth or water
1 teaspoon sesame oil (can leave out)
Pinch of red pepper flakes or dash of hot sauce
1/8 teaspoon ground ginger (just a pinch!)
1 green onion, chopped (optional)
Hot, cooked rice or quinoa for serving

DIRECTIONS

1. Start the rice or quinoa, cooking according to package directions (usually about 15-17 minutes cooking time).
2. While the rice/quinoa cooks, in a 10-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat, add the meat, garlic and 1/4 teaspoon salt and pepper. Cook, stirring to break the meat into small pieces, until the meat is cooked through and crumbly, about 7-10 minutes. Drain any excess grease.
3. Add the brown sugar, soy sauce, broth or water, red pepper flakes (or hot sauce), and ginger and stir to combine.
4. simmer over medium heat for 5 minutes or so.
5. Serve over hot, cooked rice or quinoa, topped with the chopped green onions.

# chicken caesar salad wraps

Makes 2 wraps

INGREDIENTS

2 tablespoons mayonnaise
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 to 3 tablespoons shredded Parmesan cheese
1 tablespoon lemon juice
2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
1 to 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
¼ teaspoon garlic powder
1 1/2 cups cooked, shredded chicken (a rotisserie chicken or drained, canned chicken works great here)
1 small romaine lettuce heart, torn or chopped into bite-sized pieces
2 (10-inch) whole-grain tortillas or wraps

DIRECTIONS

1. In a small bowl, whisk together the mayo, olive oil, Parmesan cheese, lemon juice, Worcestershire sauce, mustard and garlic until well-combined.
2. In a large bowl, toss the chicken and lettuce with the dressing. Divide the chicken/lettuce mixture evenly among the tortillas or wraps. Roll and secure with a toothpick, if desired. Serve.

# smoked turkey cobb wraps

Makes 1 wrap

INGREDIENTS

1 tablespoon cream cheese, light or regular
1 12-inch tortilla or wrap
2 leaves green or romaine lettuce
4-5 slices thinly sliced smoked turkey
4 thin slices tomato
1 large egg, hard-boiled and sliced
4 thin slices red onion
1/2 avocado, seeded and thinly sliced
3 strips cooked bacon, regular or turkey bacon

DIRECTIONS

1. Spread the cream cheese evenly over the tortilla. Place the lettuce down the center of the tortilla.
2. Arrange the turkey over the lettuce.
3. Layer the tomato, egg, onion and avocado over the turkey and top with the bacon.
4. Roll up tightly and slice in half diagonally. Serve immediately.

# creamy garlic alfredo sauce

Makes about 2 cups of sauce

INGREDIENTS

2 tablespoons butter
3 cloves garlic, finely minced or pressed through a garlic press or 1 teaspoon garlic powder
4 ounces cream cheese, softened and cut into 6 pieces
1 cup milk (1% or higher works best)
3 ounces Parmesan cheese, grated (about 1 cup) – not the stuff in a can
1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
1/2 teaspoon salt, more to taste, if needed

DIRECTIONS

1. In a medium pot or skillet, melt the butter over medium heat. Add the garlic and cook for about 2 minutes, stirring constantly, taking care not to let the garlic burn.
2. Add the cream cheese, stirring with a whisk until the mixture is smooth. It will look curdled at first, but with constant whisking for 2-3 minutes, it should come together to form a smooth, creamy paste.
3. Add the milk gradually, about 1/4 cup at a time, whisking quickly and constantly until each addition is incorporated fully into the sauce. Stir in the Parmesan cheese, pepper and salt. Stir until the cheese is melted and the sauce is the desired consistency.
4. Cook for 2-3 minutes for a thicker sauce or remove right after the cheese is melted for a thinner sauce. Serve immediately over hot, cooked noodles.

# crispy enchilada chicken wraps

Makes 6 wraps

*These wraps freeze great! Let them cool, wrap in plastic wrap or foil and freeze. Then unwrap and microwave when ready to eat.*

INGREDIENTS

2 to 3 cups cooked, chopped chicken
1 ½ to 2 cups cooked white or brown rice
1 (15-ounce) can pinto or black beans, rinsed and drained
1 (10-ounce) can green or red enchilada sauce
1 (4-ounce) can green chiles, drained
½ cup chopped cilantro
1 tablespoon fresh lime juice, more or less
½ teaspoon ground cumin
½ teaspoon dried oregano
¼ teaspoon chile powder
¼ teaspoon garlic powder
¼ teaspoon salt
Pinch of black pepper
8 to 10 (8-inch) tortillas
2 to 3 cups shredded Mexican-style cheese (or a combo of Monterey Jack and cheddar)
Cooking spray

DIRECTIONS

1. Combine all of the filling ingredients together in a bowl and mix to combine.
2. For each wrap, sprinkle about 1/4 cup cheese over the tortilla then spread about 1/2 cup filling down the center in a wide strip.
3. Fold one side of the tortilla over the filling, followed by the other side (so that the tortilla is folded into thirds). Press lightly to flatten. It should be thick and flat, not rounded like a burrito.
4. Heat a skillet over medium heat. Spray the seam side of the wraps with nonstick cooking spray (or brush with a bit of olive oil). Place the wraps, seam side down, on the griddle or pan and cook until golden brown and crisp, about 2-4 minutes.
5. While they cook, spray the top with nonstick cooking spray (or brush with olive oil) and carefully flip with a wide spatula and press down lightly to flatten just a bit.
6. Cook for another 2-4 minutes until golden and the filling is hot and cheesy melted.
7. Serve warm with sour cream, salsa, or other toppings of your choice!

# crispy beef and bean wraps

Makes 6 wraps

*These wraps freeze great! Let them cool, wrap in plastic wrap or foil and freeze. Then unwrap and microwave when ready to eat.*

INGREDIENTS

*Filling:*

1 pound lean ground beef
½ cup diced onion
16-ounce can refried beans
4-ounce can green chiles, drained
1 teaspoon garlic powder
1 teaspoon chili powder
1 teaspoon ground cumin
½ teaspoon paprika
½ teaspoon salt

*Wraps:*

2 to 3 cups Mexican-style shredded cheese
8 to 10 8- or 10-inch tortillas
Cooking spray or olive oil, for brushing

DIRECTIONS

1. In a skillet set over medium heat, cook the ground beef and onion until the meat is no longer pink, 3 to 4 minutes. Drain excess grease.
2. In a medium bowl, stir together the refried beans, green chiles, garlic powder, chili powder, cumin, paprika and salt. Add the ground beef and onions and stir to combine evenly.
3. For each wrap, sprinkle about 1/4 cup cheese over the tortilla then spread about 1/2 cup filling down the center in a wide strip.
4. Fold one side of the tortilla over the filling, followed by the other side (so that the tortilla is folded into thirds). Press lightly to flatten. It should be thick and flat, not rounded like a burrito.
5. Heat a skillet over medium heat. Spray the seam side of the wraps with nonstick cooking spray (or brush with a bit of olive oil). Place the wraps, seam side down, on the griddle or pan and cook until golden brown and crisp, about 2-4 minutes.
6. While they cook, spray the top with nonstick cooking spray (or brush with olive oil) and carefully flip with a wide spatula and press down lightly to flatten just a bit.
7. Cook for another 2-4 minutes until golden and the filling is hot and cheesy melted.
8. Serve warm with sour cream, salsa, or other toppings of your choice!

# one pot creamy tuna and shells

Serves 3

INGREDIENTS

½ teaspoon garlic powder
1/2 cup milk
1 cups water
1 1/4 cups chicken broth
8 ounces small or medium pasta shells
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1 to 2 tablespoons additional milk
1 to 2 teaspoons Dijon or yellow mustard
Squeeze of fresh lemon juice
1 (5-ounce) can tuna, drained
Salt and pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

1. In a medium saucepan, stir in the milk, water, broth, shells, salt and pepper. Bring to a simmer, and cook, uncovered, stirring often (at a simmer, not a rigorous boil) until the pasta is al dente, according to package directions (the pasta will continue to cook a bit over the next few minutes so don't overcook it in this step). Each brand of pasta will will differ slightly; depending on the brand, you may need to add a bit more liquid toward the end of cooking time if the liquid has simmered out – if so, add ¼ cup water or broth at a time (don't add too much). There should be a bit of liquid left even after the shells are just tender. They'll continue to soften up and the liquid will be absorbed as other ingredients are stirred in and as it rests.
2. Stir in the 1 to 2 additional tablespoons milk, mustard, and lemon juice. Add the tuna and mix gently until combined. Stir in additional salt and pepper to taste, if needed.
3. Let the pasta rest for 5-10 minutes - it will thicken up and get nice and creamy.
4. Sprinkle with parsley and serve with extra lemon wedges - it is delicious with lemon juice drizzled over the top of individual servings.

# creamy white chili

Serves 3

*You can easily skip the first step of cooking the chicken raw and use cooked chicken (chopped rotisserie chicken or canned chicken, drained, and stir it in at the end to heat through).*

INGREDIENTS

1/2 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
½ cup chopped onion or 1 teaspoon onion powder
1 1/2 teaspoons garlic powder
1 tablespoon oil
1 can Great Northern Beans, rinsed and drained
3 ½ cups chicken broth
1 can (4 ounces each) chopped green chilies
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon ground cumin
½ teaspoon dried oregano
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
½ cup sour cream
½ cup cream or half and half
Fresh cilantro, for garnish (optional)

DIRECTIONS

1. In a large saucepan, sauté chicken, onion (or onion powder) and garlic in oil until chicken is no longer pink.
2. Add beans, broth, chilies and seasonings. Bring to a boil.
3. Reduce heat; simmer, uncovered, for 30 minutes. Remove from the heat; stir in sour cream and cream.
4. Garnish with fresh cilantro, if desired. Serve immediately. This is especially good served with tortilla chips.

# mexican-style haystacks

Serves 3 to 4

INGREDIENTS

1/2 pound ground beef or ground turkey
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4teaspoon black pepper
1/4 teaspoon paprika or smoked paprika
2 teaspoons chili powder
1/2 teaspoon cumin
1/4 teaspoon onion powder
1/4 teaspoon dried oregano
1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 cup beef broth
8-ounce can tomato sauce
15-ounce can black beans, rinsed and drained
1/2 cup frozen or canned corn kernels, drained
Hot, cooked rice, for serving
Taco toppings: lettuce, sour cream, cheese, olives, etc

DIRECTIONS

1. In a large 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat, add the ground beef or turkey, salt and pepper, and cook, breaking the meat into small pieces, until cooked through. Drain excess grease, if needed.
2. Stir in the paprika, chili powder, cumin, onion powder, oregano, garlic powder and flour. The mixture will be crumbly. Cook for 1-2 minutes, stirring constantly, until the meat and spices are fragrant and sizzling.
3. Whisking quickly and constantly, slowly add the beef broth and tomato sauce about 1/2 cup at a time, letting the mixture thicken and bubble between additions before adding more.
4. Stir in the back beans and corn. Bring the mixture to a simmer and cook 5-7 minutes until thickened.
5. Serve the sauce over rice with lime wedges and taco toppings of your choice.

# pasta al forno: simple baked pasta

Serves 3

INGREDIENTS
14-ounce can diced tomatoes
1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
1/2 teaspoon dried basil
1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
¼ teaspoon salt
Pinch of black pepper
8 ounces penne pasta
4 ounces mozzarella cheese, cut into small cubes or use shredded mozzarella
1/3 cup shredded Parmesan cheese

DIRECTIONS
1. In a large pot of lightly salted water, cook the pasta until al dente according to package directions. While the pasta is cooking, in a 10-nonstick skillet, add the tomatoes (undrained), oregano, basil, garlic powder, salt and pepper. Simmer for 10-15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the mixture is slightly thickened. Add additional salt and pepper to taste, if needed.
2. After draining the pasta, return the noodles to the pot and pour in the sauce. Toss to combine. Lightly coat a square 8X8 or 9X9-inch baking pan with cooking spray. Place half of the pasta in the dish. Sprinkle half of the Parmesan and half of the mozzarella cubes over the top. Top with remaining pasta. Sprinkle remaining cheeses over the top. Bake at 400 degrees F for 15 minutes until hot and bubbly.

# skillet honey garlic chicken

Serves 3 to 4

INGREDIENTS

1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cubed
Salt and pepper
1/2 cup chicken broth
1 teaspoon garlic powder
1 tablespoons honey
1 tablespoons soy sauce
1/2 teaspoon cornstarch
Pinch red pepper flakes (optional)
1 tablespoon olive oil
Hot, cooked rice, for serving

DIRECTIONS

1. Lightly season the chicken pieces with salt and pepper.
2. Whisk together the broth, garlic powder, honey, soy sauce, cornstarch, and red pepper flakes. Set aside.
3. In a large, nonstick 12-inch skillet, heat the olive oil over medium heat until hot and rippling.
4. Add the chicken in a single layer and cook, without stirring, for a minute or two until the chicken starts to turn golden on the side in contact with the hot skillet. Flip the chicken pieces.
5. Whisk the sauce to recombine and stir it into the skillet; bring the mixture to a simmer.
6. Cook for 2-3 minutes until the sauce has thickened slightly and the chicken is cooked through.
7. Serve over hot, cooked rice.

# simple orange chicken with broccoli

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

1 tablespoon canola oil
1 tablespoon minced or grated fresh ginger or 1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
2 garlic cloves, finely minced or 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into 1/2-inch strips
Salt and pepper
2 cups fresh broccoli florets
1/4 cup water
1/2 cup low-sodium chicken broth
1/4 cup orange juice
3 tablespoons low-sodium soy sauce
1 teaspoon sugar
1-2 teaspoons freshly grated orange zest
2 teaspoons cornstarch, dissolved in 1 tablespoon water

DIRECTIONS

1. In a medium nonstick skillet, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the ginger and garlic, stirring constantly, until fragrant, about 1 minute. Season the chicken with salt and pepper and add to the skillet. Saute until cooked through, about 5-6 minutes. Transfer the chicken to a plate and set aside.
2. In the same skillet, combine the broccoli florets and the water, stirring to scrape up any browned bits on the bottom of the pan. Cover the skillet and cook until the broccoli is crisp-tender, about 2 minutes.
3. Return the chicken to the pan and stir in the broth, orange juice, soy sauce, sugar and orange zest. Add the dissolved cornstarch mixture and cook, stirring frequently, until the sauce boils and thickens slightly. Serve over hot, cooked brown or white rice.

# skillet creamy macaroni and cheese

Serves 2 to 3

*This mac and cheese will be WAY creamier if you shred the cheese yourself but pre-shredded cheese can definitely be used! Make sure to eat this right away; it's much creamier served immediately after making.*

INGREDIENTS

1 3/4 cups water, plus extra if needed
6-ounce can evaporated milk
6 ounces (about 1 1/2 cups) elbow macaroni
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon cornstarch
1/4 teaspoon dry mustard or yellow mustard
1/4 teaspoon hot sauce
6 ounces cheddar cheese, shredded (1 1/2 cups)
6 ounces Monterey Jack cheese, shredded (1 1/2 cups)
1 tablespoons butter, cut into small chunks
Ground black pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

1. Add the water, ½ cup of the evaporated milk (reserve the rest for a later step), macaroni, and salt and bring to a simmer in a 10 or 12-inch nonstick skillet over high heat. Cook at a vigorous simmer, stirring often, until the macaroni is tender and the liquid has thickened, 9 to 12 minutes.
2. In a small bowl, whisk the remaining ¼ cup evaporated milk, the cornstarch, mustard and hot sauce together in a small bowl, then stir into the skillet. Continue to simmer slightly thickened, about 1 minute.
3. Off the heat, stir in the cheddar and Monterey Jack, one handful at a time, adding water as needed to adjust the consistency of the sauce (I didn't need any additional water when I made it). Stir in the butter and season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately.

# the best sloppy joes

Serves 3-4

INGREDIENTS

¼ cup diced onion
1 pound ground beef or ground turkey
1 tablespoon tomato paste
1/3 cup BBQ sauce
¼ cup ketchup
2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
2 tablespoons soy sauce
Salt and pepper, to taste
Rolls or buns, for serving

DIRECTIONS

1. In a 10-inch nonstick skillet set over medium heat, add the onions and beef (or ground turkey). Cook, breaking the meat into small pieces, until the meat is cooked through and the onions are translucent, 7-8 minutes. Drain excess grease.
2. Stir in the tomato paste, BBQ sauce, ketchup, Worcestershire, and soy sauce and a pinch of black pepper. Bring the mixture to a simmer ,and cook until the sauce is slightly thickened, 4 to 5 minutes. Add additional salt and pepper, to taste, if needed.
3. Serve the sloppy joe meat warm on buns or rolls.

# french bread pizza

Serves 4 to 6

*The leftovers of this pizza makes great leftover to eat for several meals! The leftovers can also be frozen and reheated later.*

INGREDIENTS

1 loaf (about 12-inches) french bread
1 tablespoon olive oil
Garlic powder, for sprinkling
1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese, more or less
1-2 cups pizza sauce
Pizza toppings of choice: mozzarella cheese, pepperoni, etc.

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 425 degrees F.
2. Slice the french bread in half the long way, forming two long halves (like a hot dog bun but don't keep them attached). Lightly press on the bread with the palms of your hands until it is a bit flattened – ½-inch thick or so. This helps the bread not get soggy with sauce.
3. Drizzle the olive oil on both halves, about 1/2 tablespoon for each half, and brush lightly into the dough. Sprinkle with just a touch of garlic powder.
4. Sprinkle half of the Parmesan cheese across each loaf. Place the loaves of bread on an aluminum-foil lined baking sheet and bake for 3-5 minutes, until the Parmesan cheese is just barely starting to turn golden and has hardened a bit to the touch. Take care not to burn the Parmesan!
5. Spread pizza sauce on top of the Parmesan-crusted loaves and top with pizza toppings of your choice. I usually go with about 1 cup of mozzarella cheese for each half and throw on some pepperoni and olives but the sky is definitely the limit here!
6. Bake the pizzas for 8-10 minutes until the cheese is bubbly and the edges of the bread are starting to crisp up and turn golden.
7. Using a serrated knife, cut into pieces and serve immediately.

# instant pot "baked" ziti

Serves 6

INGREDIENTS

2 cups chicken broth
2 cups cream or half-and-half
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon black pepper
½ teaspoon garlic powder
1 pound dry penne pasta
15-ounce can crushed tomatoes
1 ½ teaspoons dried oregano
1 ½ teaspoons dried basil
½ to 1 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
Fresh basil, for serving (optional)

DIRECTIONS

1. Lightly spray the bottom and sides of a 6-quart Instant Pot with nonstick cooking spray. Pour in the broth and cream and add the salt, pepper and garlic.
2. Add the pasta; don't stir, but if it's mounded in the center, arrange into an even layer. Pour the crushed tomatoes evenly over the pasta and sprinkle the oregano and basil over the top. Don't stir.
3. Secure the lid of the Instant Pot, set the valve to seal, and select "manual" or "pressure cook" and dial up or down to the minutes needed --> take the cooking time on the pasta package directions, cut it in half and subtract two more minutes. So for pasta that cooks to al dente in 12 minutes, the IP cooking time would be 4 minutes (add an extra minute if you like your pasta super soft).
4. Let the pressure release naturally for 10 minutes and then quick release the remaining pressure.
5. Add the Parmesan cheese and stir thoroughly (it's ok if there are some darker, cooked spots on the bottom of the pot/bottom layer of pasta). Serve the ziti immediately with chopped, fresh basil, and additional Parmesan, if desired.

# super simple spicy thai noodles

Serves 2 to 3

INGREDIENTS

1/2 pound linguine or spaghetti
1 tablespoon crushed red pepper flakes
1/4 cup toasted or regular sesame oil
1 tablespoon fresh lime juice or rice vinegar
3 tablespoons honey
3 tablespoons low-sodium soy sauce
Chopped green onions, shredded carrots, chopped peanuts, chopped cilantro for topping

DIRECTIONS

1. In a small saucepan, heat the sesame oil and red pepper flakes on low heat for 10-15 minutes. Pour the oil through a fine strainer into a liquid measuring cup and discard the pepper flakes. To the warm oil, whisk in the lime juice (or vinegar), honey and soy sauce. Set aside.
2. In a large pot of boiling, salted water, cook the linguine according to package directions. Drain the noodles and return them to the pot or to a large bowl. Toss the noodles with the oil mixture.
3. Serve the noodles warm, room temperature or cold with the desired toppings sprinkled on top.

# easiest pancakes

Makes 8 to 9 pancakes

INGREDIENTS

2 ¼ cups (320 g) all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons granulated sugar
1 tablespoon baking powder
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon baking soda
1 ⅔ cup (400 g) milk
4 tablespoons (57 g) butter, melted
2 large (100 g) eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

DIRECTIONS

1. In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, baking powder, salt and soda.
2. Make a well in the center and add the milk, butter, eggs and vanilla.
3. Whisk together until no dry streaks remain. A few lumps are ok. Don't over mix.
4. Heat a griddle to medium heat (350 degrees F on my nonstick griddle) until a drop of water sizzles across the surface.
5. Pour batter into circles on the preheated griddle (I use my #20 cookie scoop, which holds about 3-4 tablespoons, to portion out the batter ).
6. Cook until small bubbles appear on the surface and the edges are set.
7. Flip the pancakes and cook until golden and no longer doughy in the center. Repeat with remaining batter.
8. Serve immediately or keep warm in a single layer in 170-degree oven until ready to serve.

# mini banana chocolate chip muffins

Makes 24 mini muffins

INGREDIENTS

1 cup + 2 tablespoons all-purpose or whole wheat flour
½ teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon salt
½ cup milk or buttermilk
¼ cup honey or granulated sugar
1 large egg yolk (separate the egg and discard the egg white)
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
½ to ¾ mashed ripe bananas (about 1 to 2 small bananas)
3 tablespoons butter, melted, or canola or vegetable oil
1/2 cup mini chocolate chips

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Lightly grease a 24-cup mini muffin pan.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt.
3. In a small bowl or liquid measuring cup, whisk together the milk or buttermilk, honey or sugar, egg and vanilla until well-combined.
4. To the dry ingredients, add the milk mixture, mashed bananas, and butter.
5. Mix with a silicone spatula until a few dry streaks remain.
6. Add the chocolate chips and mix until just combined. Don't over mix.
7. Fill the mini muffin pan(s) 3/4 full with batter. Bake for 10-15 minutes until the tops spring back lightly to the touch. Let cool for 2-3 minutes before removing to a wire rack to cool completely.

# the best chocolate chip cookies

Makes about 3 dozen cookies

*This recipe can easily be cut in half – OR the extra cookies can be frozen for later!*

INGREDIENTS

2 sticks (16 tablespoons) butter, softened
3/4 cup packed light brown sugar
3/4 cup granulated sugar
2 large eggs
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
3 cups flour (fluff the flour, scoop in the cup and level off)
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
2 cups chocolate chips

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Line baking sheets with parchment paper or lightly grease with cooking spray.
2. In a large bowl or in the bowl of an electric stand mixer, cream together the butter, brown sugar, granulated sugar, eggs, and vanilla until light and fluffy, 2-3 minutes. Add the flour, baking soda, baking powder, salt and chocolate chips. Mix until combined.
3. Roll into balls and drop onto the prepared baking sheets.
4. Bake for 10-11 minutes until the edges are just set and the middles are still light and fluffy. Let the cookies rest on the baking sheets for 3-4 minutes before removing to a wire rack to cool completely.

# no-bake granola bites

Makes about 30 bites

INGREDIENTS

2 cups quick oats
1 cup crispy rice cereal (like Rice Krispies)
1 cup creamy peanut butter
1 cup ground flaxseed
1 cup mini chocolate chips
2/3 cup honey or agave nectar
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
2 tablespoons coconut oil

DIRECTIONS

1. Combine all the ingredients together in a large bowl, mixing gently so the crispy rice cereal doesn't get crushed. Mix until well-combined.
2. Using a cookie scoop (or roll small amounts in your hands), drop rounded tablespoonful-sized portions onto a parchment or wax paper lined cooking sheeet. I used my cookie scoop and then rolled the scooped portion out between my palms.
3. Refrigerate for 1-2 hours. At this point you can serve them or combine the chilled granola bites in a large tupperware-type container or ziploc bags to freeze or refrigerate. They will stay fresh in the refrigerator for up to a week or for a few months in the freezer.

# oatmeal peanut butter chocolate chip bars

Makes a 9X13-inch pan of bars

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
3/4 teaspoon baking soda
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 cup rolled oats
1/2 cup (8 tablespoons) butter, softened
1/3 cup peanut butter, creamy or crunchy
1/2 cup granulated sugar
1/2 cup lightly packed light brown sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 large egg
1 large egg yolk
1 cup peanut butter chips
1 cup chocolate chips, semisweet, bittersweet or milk

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Lightly grease a 9X13-inch baking pan and set aside.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, baking soda, salt and oats.
3. In a large bowl (or in the bowl of an electric stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment), cream together the butter, peanut butter, granulated and brown sugars until light and well-mixed, 2-3 minutes. Mix in the vanilla, egg and egg yolk until combined.
4. Stir in the dry ingredients, chocolate chips and peanut butter chips and mix until combined.
5. Press the batter into the prepared pan. Bake for 18-20 minutes until lightly browned on the edges. Don't overbake or the bars will be dry! Remove the pan to a cooling rack and let the bars cool in the pan before cutting into squares.